

Dear Chairs Haddad and Haskell,

My name is Kateryna Omelchenko. I am currently a sophomore at the University of Connecticut. I live on my school's campus in Storrs, Connecticut. I am represented by Senator Mae flexer and Representative Brian Smith. The bill that we are discussing today HB 6374 is incredibly important to me. Unfortunately, we have to face the realities of sexual assault on college campuses. Sexual assault affects thousands of people around the country every day however, it affects young people the most. Undergraduate college students like myself are at the highest risk and those rates only continue to rise.

HB 6374 implements essential measures. The first being a campus climate survey every four years. The aim of this survey is to collect anonymous data from students about sexual assault. This data would allow for schools to better understand the issue at hand and implement the proper policies and procedures. A great deal of students don't report the assault that they experienced after it happened for a number of reasons. I know this for a fact because many of my friends at Uconn were victims to assault on our campus. While they didn't report it they still continue to suffer from the trauma of that incident. You never think that someone you're close to will be a victim of a crime like this but the reality of it is that it is way more common than we think. If schools like mine were required to collect data more of my friends would have been given the chance to safely share their experiences. Sharing those experiences is incredibly difficult but it's also extremely valuable because it gives the school a bigger picture of what's going on, it allows for the school to change policies and provide young people with the education and resources they need to both prevent and overcome the occurrence of sexual assault.

This bill will also ensure that an amnesty policy is held by the schools. This means that victims who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol will not be penalized when reporting their abuse. Nobody deserves to be sexually assaulted even if they are under the influence and it doesn't make it their fault. We have to accept that drugs and alcohol will always be present around young people especially in a college setting. Survivors shouldn't have to choose between reporting their abuse or not being penalized for being under the influence. It's simply unfair. At the end of the day it doesn't matter how much you drank, no means no. There's no question about it.

I know these bills will only benefit students like myself. They will bring forth a platform where students can safely share their experiences which in turn will help schools respond to sexual violence. Most importantly it will also help prevent it from occurring. The goal is to keep students like myself safe and that's exactly what this bill would do. You, the legislators here today have the power to implement this bill and ensure campus safety. Thank you for your time.

Kateryna Omelchenko
University of Connecticut